

Boreal Forest Trail

Wrangell-St. Elias
National Park & Preserve
US Department of the Interior



Welcome to Wrangell- St. Elias National Park and Preserve! Stroll this short 1/2 mile trail for spectacular glimpses into the largest of our National Parks. Enjoy the vast panoramas of giant volcanic peaks and dense foliage of the boreal forest. Listen for the sounds of the Copper River, and walk in the footsteps of early pioneers along a section of historic trail.

Volcanic Vistas

Stop along the bluff and take in the fantastic views of the Wrangell Mountains. This range of ancient volcanoes forms the rugged heart of the park. On a clear day, you may observe 3 major peaks and many smaller domes and cones. **Mount Drum** (12,010') dominates the foreground, while the massive dome shape of **Mount Wrangell** (14,163') can be seen further to the right. Look carefully to the far south for huge **Mount Blackburn** (16,390'), the highest of the park's volcanoes.

Mount Wrangell's gently sloping dome shape belies the violent forces within. It is Alaska's largest *active* volcano and a plume of steam is often observed rising from its lofty summit.

As large as these mountains are, geologists believe that they are merely remnants of once much larger lava domes. Cataclysmic eruptions and incessant erosion by glaciers has carved them down to today's size.

Mt. Drum

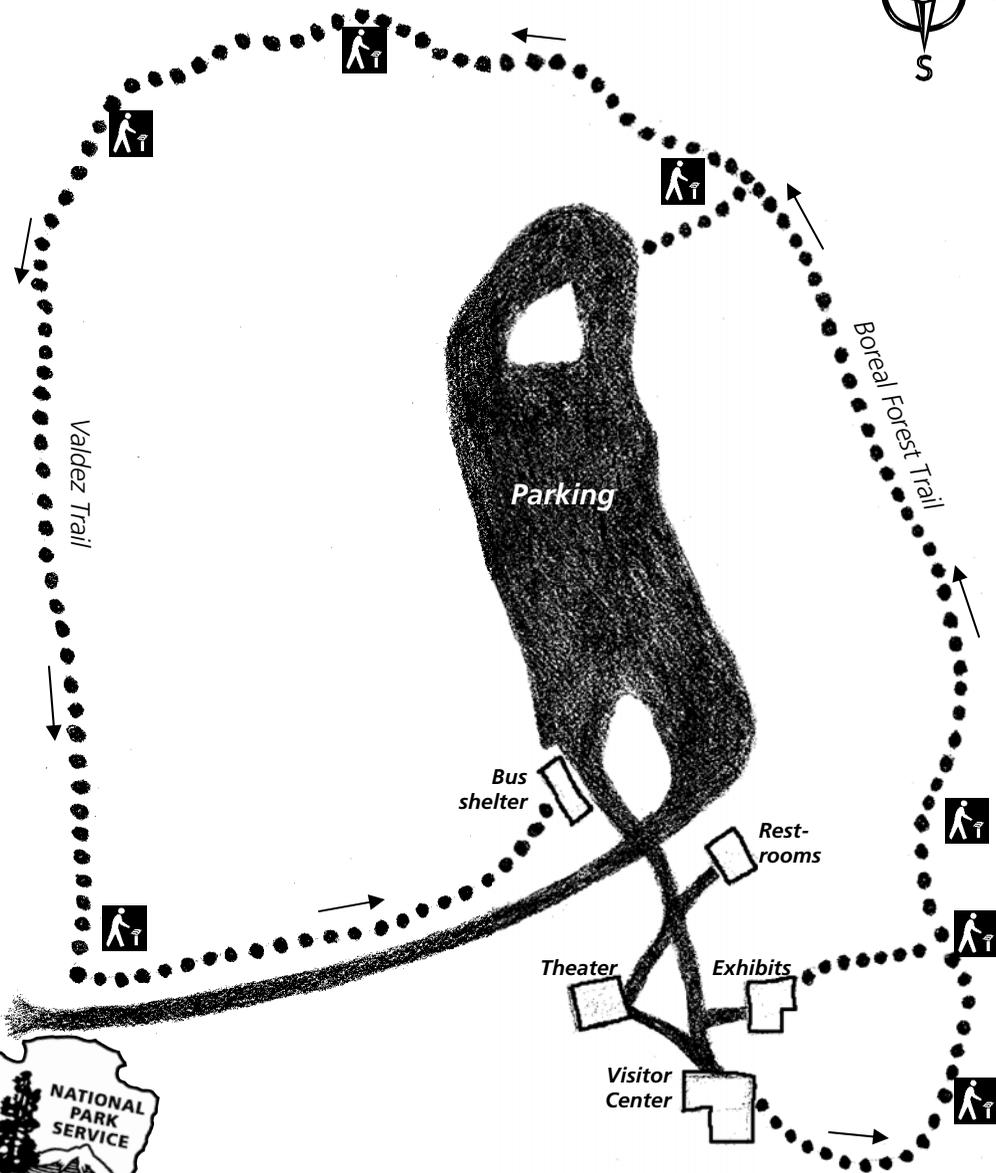
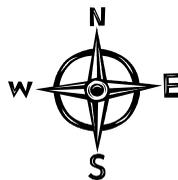
Mt. Wrangell

Mt. Blackburn



Trail Map

Enjoy the 1/2 mile loop

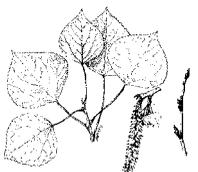


—●—●—●—●—	Trail
	Interpretive Panel

The Boreal Forest



White Spruce



Quaking Aspen



Willow

This trail provides a great opportunity to become acquainted with the boreal forest of Alaska. Circling the earth's high latitudes in a green swath of spruce, aspen, willow, and birch, this circumpolar northern forest is the largest land ecosystem on the planet! This is a fascinating place where annual rhythms are closely attuned to the changing seasons. The growing season is very short. Long, warm days of summer soon give way to winter darkness, deep snow, and bitter cold. The ground here is completely frozen from October through March. Everything here must be able to survive temperatures that regularly plummet to 40- 50° below zero!

White spruce is the most common evergreen tree found in this well-drained soil. With evergreen needles, spruce can photosynthesize year-round. Spruce needles are stiff, sharp, square in shape, and you can

feel the edges by rolling one between your fingers. The seeds from the cones are a favorite food of the Red Squirrel. Listen for the chattering bark of this forest dweller and look for evidence of their harvesting activities.

Those spindly forests of small scruffy trees you've seen along highways are comprised of **Black Spruce**. An indicator of wet, boggy soils, black spruce often forms "drunken forests" of leaning trees formed by freezing and thawing of the wet soil.

The striking white bark of the **Quaking Aspen** is all around you. With a leaf stem flattened perpendicular to the leaves, the foliage shimmers, or "quakes" in the slightest breeze. Did you know that most aspen reproduce by sending new shoots off of existing roots? Most of these trees are interconnected underground!

The Copper River

From points along the trail, you have a good vantage of the Copper River, which is the main drainage of the Wrangell Mountains and the only river to penetrate through the coastal barrier of the Chugach Mountains.

Born of glacier ice on the northern slopes of Mt. Wrangell, the Copper is a mighty river that is loaded with fine "rock flour" from glaciers. With the 4th highest sediment load in the world, the Copper defines much of the park boundary as it rages its way to the sea near Cordova.

Despite the large amount of silt, many fish are able to survive in the water, and thousands of salmon (primarily chinook/king and sock-eye/red salmon) travel upriver from the ocean to spawn in tributary streams each summer.

The Copper River is popular for subsistence fishing, and you may have the opportunity to see traditional fish wheels harvesting salmon, or people dip-netting along its banks while in this general area.

Wildlife



Look and listen carefully for a chance to observe wildlife. Moose, pine marten, fox, and even black bear have been sighted in this area. Dense forest vegetation hides large animals, but provides vital habitat for birds, both year round residents and abundant summer visitors.

Birds you may enjoy any time of year include boreal and black-capped chickadee, common redpoll, gray jay, pine grosbeak, and common raven.

As days lengthen and trees begin to leaf-out in May, the quiet of the winter woods gives way to a symphony of bird song. Hundreds of species of songbirds make the long

journey to these northern forests to take advantage of the open spaces and flush of nutritious insect food. Listen for the beautiful songs of the varied thrush, Swainson's thrush, American robin, yellow-rumped warbler, ruby crowned kinglet, and Western wood peewee...all of which nest along this trail.

It is not unusual to look up and see a bald eagle soaring above you while walking this trail during the summer. Bald eagles build their nests in trees along the banks of the river and often forage along these bluffs.

Valdez Trail



Many thousands have passed this way before you. The last, straight section of trail is a ghostly remnant of the original Valdez Trail. During the great Klondike gold rush, most stampeders reached the gold fields from Skagway via the Chilkoot Pass. Many Americans objected to Canadian control of that route. In response, the U.S. government constructed an alternate trail from Valdez to Fairbanks. You are now walking that trail.

By 1899, prospectors were flooding into the Copper Basin. Soon, enter-

prising citizens established "roadhouses" along the route. These small inns provided a convenient and comfortable place to stop. Many, like Copper Center, eventually developed into small communities.

The first automobile negotiated the entire trail in 1913. Subsequent improvements have buried most of the Valdez Trail beneath today's Richardson and Glenn Highways. Along this section, however, you can still imagine the adventure and hardships of early Alaskan travelers.

Now that you've explored the forest trail, make sure to stop by the exhibit building and visitor center to learn more about your national park. Park Rangers are available to help you plan a visit. Drive carefully and enjoy your journey through Alaska's Copper River Basin.